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Lie Detector Defended Before Skeptical Panel

Experts Agree Success of Exams Depends on Operator, but Differ Over Training

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Exclusive to The Times from the Washington Post

WASHINGTON—A panel of lie detector experts stoutly defended the reliability of polygraph tests before a skeptical House subcommittee Thursday.

The experts agreed that the reliability depends on the skill of the examiner, however — and then they could not agree on the training required to develop a competent operator.

Fred E. Inbau, a Northwestern University law professor who estimated earlier that 80% of the federal government's polygraph operators are unqualified, said apprenticeship training should be required for all examiners.

Four Witnesses

He also recommended the immediate creation of an inter-agency committee to establish standards and policies for government's use of the polygraph.

Inbau was one of four witnesses appearing before a government operations subcommittee headed by Rep. John E. Moss, (D-Cal.).

Moss said it seemed incredible to him that an examiner without medical training could reliably interpret the physiological reactions with polygraph measures.

Cleve Backster, who gives a six-week course at his school of lie detection in New York, said his program, followed by supervised experience, develops competent examiners.

John A. Reid and George Lindberg, of John E. Reid & Associates of Chicago, recommended a six-month course followed by a six-month apprenticeship.

Along with other standards, including a college degree, Lindberg proposed that the government also require examiners to undergo lie detector tests themselves.

Ogden R. Reid (R-N.Y.) asked whether government use of the polygraph should be halted until adequate standards are developed.

Inbau was not ready to go that far. "I'm not for pulling the rug out all at once," he said.

The subcommittee's preliminary investigation showed that 19 agencies administered more than 19,000 polygraph tests in 1963. Many of the tests were given in screening job applicants.

Backster said polygraph examinations are three times as effective as field investigations in turning up derogatory material about applicants for jobs in the Central Intelligence Agency.

Subcommittee members were startled by Lindberg's statement that the Reid laboratory has turned up homicides, which were not reported because they were not "at issue" in the examinations being conducted.

"It is surprising and somewhat shocking to me that this exists," said Rep. John S. Monogan, (D-Conn.).

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